CHAPTER 5

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS: INTERFACE OF GENDER, PREVALENCE, IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the issue of interpersonal violence and abuse (IPVA), including controlling behaviours, in the intimate relationships of young people aged 13 to 17 years-old. Findings from three studies, undertaken by the author alongside colleagues, are used to demonstrate the prevalence and impact of IPVA in young relationships, including some exploration of young people's own narratives and understandings. Two of the studies (Barter et al; 2009, Wood et al 2010) explored physical, sexual and emotional forms of IPVA in the UK. The third study (Barter et al 2015) 'Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships', known as 'STIR', addressed the ways in which new technologies were used in young people's

relationships to both reinforce other forms of face-to-face IPVA as well as constituting a discrete form of abuse. Building on these findings, the second half of the chapter addresses what we can do to prevent this form of abuse in young people's lives, and discusses the app that was developed as part of the STIR project.

Most international research on IPVA in young people's relationships has addressed three forms of abuse: physical; sexual and emotional/psychological. However, more recent studies have sought to examine the issue of abuse though new technologies, examine one or more of the following components: emotional online abuse (e.g. posting nasty/derogatory online messages); controlling behaviour (e.g. using mobile phones or social networking sites to try and control who someone can be friends with/where they go/or how to dress); surveillance (e.g. constantly checking on what partners have been doing /who they you have been seeing, demanding passwords to online social media accounts); social isolation (e.g. attempting to isolate partners from friends by posting untrue/derogatory messages from their phones etc.) and coerced sexting. It is important to remember that in practice different forms of IPVA often intersect.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two of the research studies used a mixed-method approach combining a school-based survey with in depth semi-structured interviews with young people aged 14 to 17 years old. The first study (Barter et al 2009) explored the use of emotional, physical and sexual forms of violence in adolescent relationships through a non-representative survey of 1,350 young people from 15 schools across England, Scotland and Wales and 91 interviews with young people. The second mixed-method project (Barter et al 2015) also addressed the emerging issue of abuse through new technologies, including controlling behaviours and pressured sexting in Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy and Norway. These countries were chosen to reflect differential levels of gender equality (Eurobarometer 2010) and use of new technology as reported in the EU kids online survey (Livingstone et al 2011). The project included: expert workshops across the five countries; a non-representative survey (n=4,500) of young people from 45 schools; 100 interviews; and the development of an app for young people to explore their own relationship experiences, and to identify signs of risk and sources of support. The sampling framework ensured a balance by gender, schools from rural and urban areas and localities of economic diversity. Both studies facilitated young people's participation through youth advisory groups. The qualitative

study (Wood et al 2011) explored the IPVA experiences and views of more 'disadvantaged' young people (n=82) from a range of UK settings including young parent projects, young offender institutions, pupil referral units for excluded pupils, residential children's homes, and foster care.

FINDINGS

The following section findings on prevalence rates and impact of IPVA victimisation in young people's relationships alongside young people's own narrative experiences and views. These are contextualised through comparison to two recent international meta-analyses on IPVA in young people relationships.

In both surveys only young people who reported a partner, defined as someone they had been intimate with on a casual or long-term basis, were included in the IPVA analysis. This equated to 88 per cent (n=1185) for the 2009 survey and 72 per cent (n=3277), for the 2015 survey. All young people who reported a partner were asked how often they had experienced a specific abusive behaviour from a previous or current partner. Respondents could choose from never, once, a few times, often. In the following section

all respondents who answered once or more have been combined into a single abuse category for analysis.

Emotional Abuse/Controlling Behaviour

The 2009 study did not substantially differentiate between online and offline forms of emotional abuse and controlling behaviour, except in respect of one component (use of mobile phones/internet to humiliate/threaten. Overall, 75 per cent of girls and 50 per cent of boys reported some aspect of emotional abuse from a partner, this represented a significant gender difference. The most commonly reported behaviours were controlling behaviour and surveillance, although it was not known if these behaviours occurred online or offline:

> Like when I'd be out with my friends and he'd drag me off and say he didn't want me out any longer and I'd got to go in and it could be like half past six. (female, Barter et al 2009)

Controlling behaviours were often normalised within young people's relationships. Wood et al (2010) found that two-thirds of female participants

compared with one-third of male participants reported some form of emotional violence, most often controlling behaviour through mobile phones. Around half of young women thought that control was an integral aspect of an intimate relationship and therefore normalised their partner's controlling behaviour. In contrast none of the boys reported this, most stated their female partner's attempts at control were unacceptable. Few girls said they felt able to challenge the control they experienced, due to fear of negative repercussions:

> Mm. And then if I go out he'll just go mad and then just basically I'll just end up crying and go back home. So I'd just rather stay in…Which was a mistake really because then he used to do that all the time then, and then obviously he had something over me. (female, Barter et al 2009)

Conversely, boys stated they either ignored the behaviour or would end the relationship if their partner's controlling behaviour continued:

> Interviewer: 'How did you deal with it [constant phoning]?'
> Male respondent: 'I turned my phone off.' (Barter et al 2009)

Building on the above research the 2015 survey separated face-to-face emotional abuse and abuse through new technologies. Across the five European countries between 31 and 59 per cent of young women and 19 and 41 per cent of young men reported experiencing one or more of the four abusive behaviours from a partner which is similar to the finding of Stonard et al (2014) who reported that around half of all young people reported some form of emotional abuse from a partner.

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Young men in England and Norway reported the lowest levels of face-to-face emotional violence. Only in England and Norway were significant gender differences found: girls were more likely to report emotional victimisation compared to boys.

Online abuse

The online abuse measure used in the 2015 survey built on our previous interview findings and emergent online measures in the wider literature (Draucker and Martsolf 2010; Marganski and Fauth 2013; Zweig et al 2013). The components sought to examine four main aspects of online

abuse: emotional abuse; control; surveillance; and isolation from support. The overall rate for experiencing some form of online violence was around 40 per cent for both young women and young men in each country, which is slightly lower than reported elsewhere (Stonard et al 2014; Wincentak et al 2016). However, young men in England and Norway reported much lower levels of online abuse compared to young people in other countries (around 23 per cent) but the impact of online abuse could be just as devastating:

> … of all the [Facebook and SMS] messages it was the message where she tried to convince me to commit suicide that was the hardest. She wrote that you don't dare it, you will never succeed…[after he attempted suicide she sent another, it said] 'I am sorry you were not successful' (male, Norway Barter et al 2015)

Reflecting the 2009 survey findings, controlling behaviour and surveillance were the most commonly experienced forms of online violence for both young women and young men:

> He began to talk dirty to me, calling me nasty things, like 'go to the kitchen, whore', but I didn't do as he wanted, I am not a slave. …[He posted an old picture saying that his girlfriend had been unfaithful to him with a girl] and then he kept writing these nasty comments, and

> people started commenting … really horrible stuff. (female, Norway Barter et al 2015)

This gender divide in respect of online victimisation where pressured sexting and unwanted sharing of sexual images is primarily experienced by girls has also been reported by others (Draucker and Martsolf 2010; Wood et al 2015; Zweig et al., 2013). In our studies, some males openly regarded online forms of abuse as acceptable or even appropriate:

> To have your girlfriend 'like' photos of people she doesn't know isn't such a nice thing to see in Facebook [...] when she does that it's as if she is saying she doesn't want me… I don't want another man to come anywhere near her… I tell her not to wear certain clothes… (male, Cyprus Barter et al 2015).

Sexual violence

The same measure of sexual violence, which incorporated both pressure and physical force, was used in the 2009 and 2015 surveys. Overall, 35 per cent of girls and 16 per cent of boys reported sexual victimisation in the 2009

survey, most often pressure. As with emotional abuse this represented a significant gender difference:

> See with my relationship it wasn't up to me (when to have sex). But when it happens it just kind of happens and then afterwards you think oh my god**.** (female, Barter et al 2009).

Rates across the European countries ranged from 17 to 41 per cent for young women and 9 to 25 per cent for young men. Again, most young people reported coercive sexual pressure rather than physical force. The 2015 survey also showed that the majority of young people reported this coercion occurred face-to-face or both face-to-face and online, very few reported online pressure in isolation. Young women in England and Norway reported the highest rates with one in three reporting some form of unwanted sexual activity:

> I thought we were going to somewhere else and he led me to a park and started like pushing me around and forcing me to do things I didn't want to do and, and he pushed my head down so hard. I was sick everywhere and then they just left me (female, England, Barter et al 2015).

Wood et al (2010) found that half of the girls in the qualitative study of disadvantaged young people in England reported experiences of sexual violence. A quarter stated this involved physical force. Only a small minority of boys reported sexual violence. Many girls did not recognise, or normalised, the seriousness of their experiences of sexual violence and were therefore less likely to seek help, reflecting the interview findings from the mixed-method studies. Many girls across studies and countries reported feeling uncertain about what they wanted sexually from their relationship or what was 'expected' of them:

> Interviewer: 'So were you ever forced into having sex?'
> Female respondent: 'Yeah, quite a few times...it's quite horrible, I was only young, well I wasn't really really young, I wasn't…like when I was 12, it was like when I was 13'. (female, Wood et al 2010)

Physical violence

As with sexual violence the same measure of physical victimisation was used across both surveys. The 2009 survey found that 25 per cent of girls

and 18 per cent of boys reported physical victimisation, a significant gender difference:

> I only went out with him for a week. And then … 'cos I didn't want to do what he wanted to (have sexual intercourse) he just started… picking on me and hitting me. (female, Barter et al 2009).

The 2015 survey identified that between 9 and 22 per cent of young women and 8 to 15 percent of young men across the five countries reported some form of physical violence:

> The boy should be the boss. The girl should do everything that he asks. But he should treat her well… I said to her: Let's go to dance! I was a bit drunk. She did not want to. I took her out and started beating her (male, Bulgaria, Barter et al 2015)

Almost one in five young women in England and Norway reported having experienced physical violence compared to one in 10 in other countries. Some young women even suggested this was deserved:

> And he raised his fist to hit me … and I was thinking ... I know it sounds stupid but … I felt as if I deserved it, but I was scared (female, Barter et al 2009)

As European research on adult domestic violence (DV) has shown, the willingness of participants to report their experiences is often heavily influenced by how DV is viewed in different countries (FRA 2014). Countries with higher gender equality and greater DV awareness also often report the highest levels of DV. This may be because in these countries DV is viewed as a social and political rather than a personal and therefore private problem. The STIR expert meetings (Barter et al 2015) and the young people's advisory groups identified that England and Norway had the highest levels of awareness in respect of interpersonal abuse in young people's relationships, and young women from these two countries reported the highest levels of physical and sexual violence in the 2015 survey. It may therefore be that female respondents from the other countries, were more likely to under-report their experiences of physical and sexual violence, than the actual prevalence of IVPA being less than in England and Norway.

The 2015 survey findings are consistent with the two recent data syntheses (Stonard et al 2014; Wincentak et al 2016) which found that approximately 20 per cent of young people experience some form of physical violence

from a partner, irrespective of gender but previous studies such adolescent females report more severe forms of IPVA (Barter et al 2009; Foshee 1996; Wolitzky-Taylor et al 2008).

The impact of IPVA

Once impact is considered alongside prevalence the gendered nature of IPVA becomes more salient. Our survey findings showed that girls more frequently report a negative subjective impact to their victimisation compared to boys (Barter et al 2009; Barter et al 2015). Most commonly girls report feeling scared, humiliated, and upset whilst boys who reported a negative consequence most often report feeling angry or annoyed (Barter et al 2009; Barter et al 2015; Wood et al 2011). Jackson et al (2000) in their New Zealand study also reported that girls experienced more negative emotional responses to IPVA victimisation than did boys. Other studies show that girls are more likely to be hurt or require medical attention than boys, whilst boys report laughing about the violence perpetrated against them (Foshee 1996; Molidor et al 2000).

Far fewer young people reported a negative consequence in relation to emotional, and to a lesser degree, online forms of abuse. Only 31 per cent of girls and 6 per cent of boys reported a negative impact to emotional victimisation in the 2009 survey, although this did significantly increase when behaviour/s were reported to occur frequently. Looking at online abuse from the 2015 survey between 49 and 83 per cent of young women and 28 to 41 per cent of young men reported a negative impact. As with emotional violence these proportions increased if the behaviour occurred frequently or if more than one form of online abuse was used. This illustrates that it is the overall patterning of emotional and online forms of abuse which causes the most distress rather than an isolated incidence, as was more the case for physical and sexual forms of violence, especially for girls.

Previous research has also identified that a range of adverse health outcomes are associated with IPVA victimisation in adolescence including suicidal behaviours, mental health problems, depression, eating disorders, substance and alcohol use, pregnancy outcomes and physical injuries (Exner-Cortens et al 2013; Silverman et al 2001; van Dulmen et al 2012). A recent review by the current author and a colleague identified that evidence indicates that IPVA health impacts appear to be more severe for girls than boys (Barter and Stanley 2016). Adolescent IPVA is also one of the strongest precursors

for female IPVA victimisation in adulthood (Exner-Cortens et al; 2013, van Dulmen et al 2012).

Our findings, alongside international research, clearly shows that IPVA in young people's relationships represents a major social issue and public health concern. Having outlined the scale and impact of the problem we now turn to explore the evidence on effective IPVA prevention programmes for young people and discuss the development of the app within the STIR project.

PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

Although robust evaluations on IPVA prevention programmes with adolescents are increasing (Wolfe et al 2009) globally there remains a substantial shortage of robust evidence on their effectiveness. Many of the evaluated prevention programmes are from North America and it remains unclear how cultural differences, including differences in dating practices and gender norms, impact on implementation in other international contexts. Interventions are likely to be culturally specific and thus it is necessary to evaluate and adjustment the intervention to fit the national or local context.

One evidenced US programme was found to be ineffective within a European context (Hamby et al 2012).

Three recent reviews provide us with clear message regarding effective prevention programmes. A Cochrane systematic review (Fellmeth et al 2013) found that programmes predominantly addressed IPVA attitudinal change, skills and knowledge transfer rather than measuring behavioural change. In conclusion the review found no evidence that interventions were effective in reducing IPVA, although they did evidence changes in attitudes and knowledge. A slightly more recent meta-analysis by De La Rue et al (2014) produced more promising results with two RCTs (Safe Dates (Foshee et al 1998) and Shifting Boundaries (Taylor et al 2013) showing long-term behavioural change (both were excluded from the Fellmeth et al review due to incomplete reporting and later publication respectively). In a review of peer sexual violence prevention Safe Dates and Shifting Boundaries were identified as the only effective interventions (DeGue et al 2014).

Fellmeth et al (2013) identified that less effective interventions tended to be short-term in duration, lacked a clear structure and model of change. They recommend that further research evaluations on multi-component interventions, which include a whole-school approach, is a priority. The De

La Rue et al review recommended that future interventions more explicitly address skills and the role of peer norms in preventing IPVA.

A recent project (Stanley et al 2015) systematically reviewed IPVA interventions for children and young people and held consultations with experts and young people. The authors report that three RCTs showed evidence of long-term behavioural change, the Fourth R programme (Wolfe et al 2009), was judged to be particularly robust. From this they provide a number of key messages including:

- Effective programmes challenge social norms including stereotypical gender norms, power differentials and victim blaming attitudes, and harness pro-social peer pressure to change attitudes;
- Both young people and experts argued for the value of drama/theatre and narrative.
- Authenticity was achieved through material that delivered emotional charge and made '*it real'* and enhanced when delivered by experts or young people themselves;
- Whole population interventions harness peer group power but can also identify those at risk who require additional services;
- Interventions must acknowledge diversity amongst children and young people;

- Messages should be positively framed and avoid blame;
- Values and attitudes of the peer group are crucial mechanisms for change;
- Children's and young people's perceptions and experiences should be incorporated into interventions; and
- Media and social media awareness campaigns can be a useful tool for engagement.

Common to all three reviews was the need to ensure prevention is based on a solid theory of change and that we are realistic about what different forms of prevention can achieve for different groups. Three main theories of change used in prevention programmes are Social Cognitive theory; Social Norms Approach; and Theory of Gender and Power.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

SCT, developed by Bandura (1986) has been widely used in public health interventions, including those addressing IPVA in adolescent relationships (for example Wolfe et al 2004). SCT holds that knowledge acquisition, attitudinal and behavioural change can be acquired through observing others

within the context of social interactions, direct experiences, and modelling positive responses. Observing a modelled behaviour can also prompt the viewer to reevaluate current negative behavior by replicating the observed behaviour.

One way of enabling this modeling and for this to feel authentic is through the use of drama. Stanley et al (2015) found that young people themselves valued interventions that made learning 'real' for them and delivers emotional 'charge'. Both the Safe Dates and the Fourth R programmes incorporate aspects of drama which enables young people, through scene enactments, to both observe behaviour and practice conflict resolution skills (Joronen et al 2008, Wolfe et al 2009). Involving young people themselves in the creation and delivery of such messages increased their authenticity for a young audience (Joronen et al 2008).

Social Norms Approach (SNA)

A wide range of IPVA prevention programmes are underpinned by a Social Norms Approach (Stanley et al 2015). SNA seeks to challenge behaviours that reinforce violence as a social norm. A strong evidence base has been

developed by bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO 2009) to support the use of interventions that challenge norms, assumptions and behaviour that tolerate violence. Healthy relationship norms, supported by the wider school learning through teacher training, are promoted to replace anti-social norms.

The Theory of Gender and Power (TGP)

A very large literature, grounded in feminism or sociology of gender, recognises the social and institutional mechanisms that constrain women's and girl's daily practices through gender-based inequities and gendered expectations (Connell 1987). Empirical evidence has shown that negative gendered attitudes are significantly connected to both experiencing and perpetrating IPVA in adolescent relationships (Barter et al 2015). The TGP theoretical model hypothesises that exposure to traditional beliefs around gendered cultural norms associated with hegemonic masculinity (active, controlling) and femininity (passive; vulnerable) serves to reinforce IPVA norms and behaviour.

A growing tendency for interventions to target young men with negative and blaming discourses (Stanley et al (2015) leads to defensive reactions and disengagement (Donovan et al 2008). To avoid this, the blaming or risk approach should be avoided and the emphasis should be placed on positive messages around masculinity (Stanley et al 2015), which challenge constraining gender norms and upholds a gender-transformative approach (WHO 2009). Conversely, programmes that uphold traditional and stereotypical conceptions of masculinity can further harmful gender norms (Fleming et al 2014).

APP DEVELOPMENT

Within the STIR project, each country convened a young people's advisory group (YPAG) consisting of between 10 and 15 members aged 14 to 17, who worked alongside the research teams for the duration of the project. One of the main priorities of the YPAG's across the five countries was to work with the researchers and wider experts to determine the aims of the app and how best to operationalise these, ensuring their relevance and appropriateness across the five country contexts. To aid communication across the YPAGs an online interactive discussion forum was setup where

groups took turns to set a specific question or discussion point related to the project which all five groups debated. The country specific discussions were then posted on the online board and these posts were then commented on, debated or elaborated on by the whole forum. All discussions were translated. This process enabled issues around IPVA definitions, terminology, cultural contents and peer norms to be explored.

For example regarding terminology all young people felt that the term 'dating violence', widely adopted in US programmes, was not applicable within a European context. Instead they preferred the term 'relationship violence' which they felt reflected a wider range of relationship types: casual, short-term or longer-term. It was also felt to be important that the app resource did not presume heteronormativity so the generic term 'partner' was used to ensure inclusion. Building on this it was agreed that the app should highlight different forms of relationship, for example in the interactive story a variety of relationships were involved, including a same-sex relationship.

It was also clear from the online discussions that country specific awareness around different aspects of IPVA existed and that certain forms of abuse, especially aspects of controlling behaviour and surveillance, were viewed with varying degrees of acceptance in some country contexts. The online

forum provided a space where young people could debate these issues and challenge each other's assumptions in ways which did not produce a defensive response but enabled participants to have space to reflect on their understandings and challenge attitudes which reinforce IPVA. For example, in one discussion jealousy was presented as an acceptable reason to justify certain forms of controlling behaviour and online surveillance. Others questioned the validity of this and instead presented ways in which trust could be better developed within relationships to reduce feeling of insecurity.

This is not to say that a consensus was always achieved across groups or within groups; however these dynamic online discussions provided a rich and culturally sensitive resource to support the app development. It was interesting that generally the commonalities across the groups were greater than the differences. All groups for example agreed that we should avoid using emotive terms such as victim, perpetrator, abuse and/or violence within the interactive aspects of the app as young people may become distressed if they felt these labels were being applied to them or their relationships. Instead an emphasis was placed on the benefits of a respectful relationship whilst unhealthy aspects were referred to as 'concerning' to reduce the chance of a defensive response.

The YPAGs wanted the app to be interactive but also felt that the format should be kept simple so that it did not look outdated quickly due to rapid advances in technology. It was also felt that photographic images may appear country specific so it was decided to restrict the format to text and graphics. The YPAGs agreed that the best way to raise young people's awareness of IPVA was through a quiz format. Two quizzes were developed: one addressed how a young person's partner behaved towards them and the other explored the young person's own relationship behaviour and attitudes. All questions were developed by young people together with the researchers. After each question the app user is asked how frequently this has occurred: never; sometimes; or often. The user is then directed to a response depending on their answer – all responses were taken from the interactive message board or from the interviews with young people and seek to reinforce positive messages regarding respectful relationships as well as highlighting possible 'concerns'. For example, the aim of the 'Is your relationship rocking' quiz was to identify issues around relationship victimisation. The 12 quiz questions were designed to help the user recognise 'the tricky situations that can arise in a relationship' through highlighting unhealthy components. If upon completion of the quiz a high number of risk factors are identified the user is directed to a further section where advice on possible sources of support and help are provided. However, and as stated earlier, it was felt important that a young person

should not be defined as an ‘abuse victim’ due to the distress this may cause and instead responses highlighted their partner’s concerning behaviour.

Similarly, the quiz to assess the young person’s own relationship behaviour asks ‘how great a partner are you?’ The challenges to successfully engaging boys in IPVA prevention and awareness have already been addressed (Stanley et al 2015). Interestingly, many male YPAG members stated that male users would be more likely to access the quiz if they felt it would help them get a partner! It was decided this may not be appropriate but that helping young people to think about how to get better at being in a relationship was acceptable.

An interactive story was also developed where the user determines how a number of relationships develop in different healthy and unhealthy ways. This resource enables young people who have not been in a relationship to explore the possible risks and contexts in which IPVA can occur as well as protective strategies. The app also provides sources of assistance and support in each country. Safety was paramount so an escape button was included to ensure the user could quickly leave the app if necessary. The prototype app was piloted with over 120 young people across the five countries and received very positive feedback. The team are currently

working towards undertaking a more in-depth evaluation of the app which is available from http://stiritapp.eu.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion it is clear from our research findings, alongside international evidence, that IPVA in young people's relationships represents a major concern, and that girls and young women experience the severest forms of IPVA and identify the most negative impacts. This form of violence, in all its connotations, requires a considered and comprehensive response. We know what effective prevention interventions look like but need to develop these, alongside children and young people, to reach beyond the North American contexts in which they have been evidenced. In the UK colleagues and I are beginning this process by transferring the Safe Dates and Shifting Boundaries interventions to the UK and undertaking RCTs to evaluate their effectiveness. However, public health prevention can only do so much and even effective interventions have been shown to have modest results. There is therefore a pressing need to ensure that alongside prevention direct and easily accessible services for young IPVA victims are developed that take their experiences seriously and work to ensure they are

kept safe and that abusive partners receive appropriate programmes and, where necessary, criminal justice responses.

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Table 5.1 Percentage of respondents reporting types of IPVA by country and gender

Country	Gender	Emotional	Online	Physical	Sexual
Bulgaria	Female	41	47	11	21
	Male	35	43	15	25
Cyprus	Female	31	45	10	17
	Male	34	43	9	19
England	Female	48	48	22	41
	Male	27	25	12	14
Italy	Female	59	40	9	35
	Male	41	46	13	39
Norway	Female	32	38	18	28
	Male	19	20	8	9

Adapted from Barter et al 2015: 27